



Region 1  
490 N. Meridian Road  
Kalispell, MT 59901

**DECISION NOTICE  
and  
Finding of No Significant Impact  
for the  
PROPOSED OTTER ISLAND FISHERIES CONSERVATION AREA ADDITIONS  
LAND ACQUISITIONS**

**July 31, 2014**

**Description of the Proposed Action**

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (MFWP) proposes to acquire 19.72 acres of island habitats, called the Otter Island Fisheries Conservation Area (FCA) Additions (Additions), and add these parcels to the existing Otter Island FCA that is located along the west side of the mainstem Flathead River, about 1.5 miles east of downtown Kalispell (Figure 1). The purpose of the proposed acquisitions is to expand protection of riparian and wetland habitats along the Flathead River mainstem, islands, and side channels for the benefit of fish and wildlife species. The Additions would be purchased at below appraised value using fisheries mitigation funds from the Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) to help offset the fishery impacts due to inundation of the lands behind Hungry Horse Dam. The parcels would be managed primarily for their habitat values and dispersed public recreation as part of MFWP's Otter Island FCA and guided by the proposed revised Otter Island FCA Management Plan.

The Additions occupy islands on both the east and west banks of the Flathead River mainstem about a mile south of the existing MFWP Old Steel Bridge Fishing Access Site (FAS) and just south and east of the main Otter Island FCA. The proposed land acquisitions include privately held parcels in two different ownerships. If completed, the acquisitions of both these Otter Island FCA Additions would complete about 2.5 miles of connected public land ownership along the west side of the Flathead River mainstem from just north of the Old Steel Bridge to the south end of Owen Sowerwine Natural Area.

**Montana Environmental Policy Act (MEPA) Process and Public Involvement**

On July 9, 2014, MFWP released a draft EA for the Otter Island Fisheries Conservation Area Additions Land Acquisitions. FWP notified the public about the land acquisitions through legal ads, press releases, and emails/letters to all adjoining landowners and other interested publics. The EA evaluated the potential impacts of the following alternatives:

**Alternative A: Proposed Action - Pursue acquisition of one/both of the Otter Island FCA Additions.**

MFWP would pursue purchase of the Otter Island FCA Additions consisting of two privately held parcels that total 19.72 acres from two different willing sellers using BPA funding, add these parcels to the existing Otter Island FCA, and manage the lands for the protection of its riparian and wetland areas according to the attached proposed revised management plan.

**Alternative B: No Action - the property would remain under private ownership.**

Under the No-Action Alternative, MFWP would not acquire either of the Otter Island FCA Additions, and they will likely be sold on the private market.

**Summary of Public Comment**

MFWP received a total of seven emails or letters during the 21-day public comment period. All were in favor of the acquisitions. One person had questions regarding what happens if/when the Flathead River channel changes course in the area around the properties.

**Comment:**

*"I have read the basic proposal for the Otter Creek addition. I am in agreement with the proposal to acquire. 2 issues that have been a point in other areas when the water course changes channels. 1. Will the original acquisition stand if the channel to the west of the main stream decreases, or if the main channel changes to the smaller channel to the east? 2. Will FWP monitor the additional acreage for compliance with the hunting and firearms restrictions?"*

**MFWP Response:**

Land along a river channel tends to erode or deposit material over time, so river landowners can lose land or gain land depending on which process is occurring. MFWP's total property acreage could increase or decrease over time depending on river movements. This is simply part of owning land along a river channel. MFWP will monitor any additional acreage that we acquire through aggradation for compliance with all rules and regulations under the OIFCA Management Plan.

**MFWP Recommended Alternative and Final Decision Recommendation**

In reviewing all the public comment and other relevant information, and evaluating the environmental effects, I recommend that MFWP pursue acquiring the Otter Island Fisheries Conservation Area Additions and recommend that the MFWP Fish & Wildlife Commission, and the State Board of Land Commissioners (where applicable) approve the proposed action.

Through the public review process described above, MFWP found no significant impacts on the human or physical environments associated with this proposal. Therefore, the EA is the appropriate level of analysis, and an environmental impact statement is not required.

Noting and including the responses to public comments, this decision notice together with the final EA and revised management plan will serve as the final documents for this proposal. MFWP believes the completion of this project is in the best interests of protecting water quality and aquatic resources associated with the Flathead Lake and River System; it would provide opportunities to manage and improve habitat for fish and wildlife, and it would provide additional recreational opportunities for the public.



---

James Williams  
Acting Regional Supervisor

---

July 31, 2014  
Date



**Figure 1.** Map showing the location of Otter Island Addition 1 and 2.